

COLORADO CANYONS NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA
Wilderness Working Group Meeting Minutes
May 21, 2002

Attendees:

Warren Gore	Terry Gray	Celeste Marsh	Bill Schapley
Joe Keys	Bill Hamman	Neal McKinstry	Troy Schnurr
Gene Arnesen	Kris Hjelle	Dave Price	Bob Sherrill
Belle Chesnick	Wade Johnson	Catherine Robertson	Harold Snyder
Shaun Deeney		Jane Ross	Julie Stotler

Greetings and Introductions

Bill Schapley opened the meeting at 6:00 p.m. and handed out the list of issues for review. Gene Arnesen, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Outdoor Recreation Planner, offered to help with the flip chart. Bill Schapley provided a brief summary of items covered during the group's last meeting and asked for any corrections to the list.

Working Group Discussions

Shaun Deeney talked about the internal agreement for administration between the BLM and the Division of Wildlife (DOW). This agreement is an open action item that will need to be revisited by the agencies—funding can change and affect future use.

Someone mentioned paleontological issues, of concern to BLM's Paleontologist, Harley Armstrong. This is thought to be an item all by itself, and a paleontological section will likely be included in the plan.

Jane Ross, Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area (CCNCA) Planning Team Leader, reported that no conference rooms are available at the BLM office for the next meeting. Dave Price is not available to meet at the Colorado National Monument facility, so Jane will confirm, by e-mail to the group members, whether the Glade Park Community Center is available.

Bill initiated a discussion on prioritizing issues, and what the group wants to work on next. Terry Gray brought up overnight camping, in the Mee Canyon area in particular, and the problem with human waste. The Wilderness needs to be kept as wild as possible, but the land will not support lots of abuse. As a result, discussing recommendations on dispersed and designated camping will be the #2 issue. The group expressed concerns with unintentionally limiting the authority of the BLM Grand Junction field office in appropriately managing resources.

Someone asked Wade Johnson, BLM Interpretive Specialist, about the costs for sanitary facilities. The group agreed on the need to allow for improvements and changes over time, based on the area's existing conditions and projected increases in use. The group will strive to keep the area's primitive character, but this should be re-evaluated with time, based on use and impact.

The Knowles Canyon area was addressed next. The current parking area is inadequate, and horse-trailer parking is needed off BS road, in the vicinity of the alcove. A group member wanted to know about the potential impact this would have on Gore's stock pond at that location. Warren Gore does not see this as much of a problem, as it is usually dry when most folks are using the area.

Also discussed was an alternative trailhead for Knowles Canyon. Some expressed a concern with developing that far back into the area. The existing trailhead is reflected on maps, and to change the trailhead now might be a problem, especially when road conditions are bad. Troy Schnurr, CCNCA Recreation Ranger, joined Catherine Robertson, BLM Grand Junction Field Manager in expressing concern over changing the trailhead. Troy felt this would only enable more public access (motorized) to that road, leading to more dispersed camping. Extensive discussions followed regarding increased conflict between livestock and the public, and locked/unlocked gates related to increased public access.

Discussions led to suggesting a locked gate with a walkthrough device, as well as gates on BS road between the Knowles and Jones Canyons Trailheads. Other methods for controlling access were talked about, such as signs prohibiting motorized vehicles. Bill mentioned a proposal to ban public motorized access to an area, and wondered if the area is really being used. Most people think the area is private, although it is now public land. Someone wondered whether this proposal constitutes a "buffer area." Reasons must exist for prohibiting public motorized use, and Jane reminded the group to include plans for future use now, through the resource management planning process.

Some discussion was held regarding current road conditions, including the hunter access road. Sieber Canyon has seen a significant increase in use this spring. Parking is available at the Knowles Canyon Trailhead, going into Sieber Canyon, with both areas within the National Conservation Area (NCA). A group member asked whether some people from BLM could be designated to choose a site for overflow parking. Jane then advised the group that adaptive management allows for making small modifications to the plan over time, based on use and impacts.

Bill suggested moving the discussion on to the Jones Canyon Trailhead. It was questioned whether any changes were needed for this area now, but developing facilities should be allowed for down the road. Catherine warned that no action should be taken now that will limit the ability to properly manage the area in the future.

A group member commented that they did not like walking across the large, flat area, just to get to the trailhead. Someone else agreed, and added that it is a 3-mile hike and moving the trailhead closer to where the hiking really begins, yet keeping the Wilderness character in the process, is preferred.

It was asked why access was gated in the first place, and Wade explained that, because of a past conflict among various user groups, this particular location was chosen for a gate as a compromise for controlling vehicle access. Extensive use by all-terrain vehicles (ATV), motorcycles, and 4-wheel drives was negatively affecting the Mountain Island Ranch. Wade added that the compromise appears to have successfully resolved these past issues.

Bill offered a couple of options for the group's discussion: 1) move the trailhead, or 2) create a single-track trail. Someone wondered if there was already an existing trail in that area. Discussion ensued with nothing decisive gained.

Another member asked about pressure to again open the road into Utah, and it was stated that the closure was done to protect cryptogamic soils. Wade is to evaluate this road closure with input from Greg Gnesios, CCNCA Manager, and then develop recommendations.

Another stated that, unless a road is designated as open, that road cannot be used by off-highway vehicles (OHV). There were some questions about this requirement and designation.

There are signs at San Rafael offering rewards for reporting OHV abuse, but Troy dislikes signs—signs do not stay up and detract from the backcountry experience. Troy would like to minimize signage, if possible.

Bill then summarized Jones Canyon; he still wants to open up another single-track trail, but it still requires walking a mile across the meadow. As another option, Warren described the location of a horse trail, which would be a shorter distance but still requiring a walk through a cow pasture. This option would be better than trying to move a gate, which would be an involved process.

It was pointed out that, depending on what time of year one visits the area, there is a dramatic difference in the land's appearance, when it is being grazed versus not being grazed. Bad road conditions could influence the movement of the gate, as well. Bill Schapley mentioned designating a subcommittee to evaluate the issue.

Wade wanted to talk about the Mee Canyon Trailhead. Bill Schapley has an issue with the kiosk and feels that signage is overdone. The road is gated at the trailhead, and depending on which road is closed, parking becomes an issue. No motorized access to the Mee Canyon Trailhead at certain times of the year creates an issue. According to Wade, there is no provision for overnight parking at the "T" intersection parking area.

The group talked about moving the trailhead, as well as moving the boundary back to where they felt it should be. An Act of Congress is probably required to change this, but it was not certain exactly what is needed to accomplish this. Bill Schapley's opinion was that the CCNCA legislation must be amended in order to change a boundary, and this is the agency's responsibility. Some in the group felt that it might be worth exploring whether there was a mapping error, and then it would just be a matter of getting that error fixed. Wade said that he would find out more on rectifying a mapping mistake compared to changing an Act of Congress, and report back at the Working Group's next meeting.

The meeting adjourned shortly after 8:00 p.m.